

Vidya Vanam

- *an Educational Initiative of the Bhuvana Foundation* **MANUAL**

1.Mission

Vidya Vanam provides education to children of tribal families and underserved families, who have not had the opportunity to participate in learning. The goal of the educational enterprise is to ensure that children from underserved areas become self-learners for life in an environment that is supportive and free.

At Vidya Vanam the environment nurtures scholastic and vocational learning that emphasizes the close inter-relationship between the world outside and oneself and seeks to empower students to be productive members of their community.

2. Outline of Philosophy that guides teaching and education at Vidya Vanam

The central ethos of the school is centered on the objective that learning can best be achieved in an environment that is devoid of fear. Children at all ages are encouraged to question, debate and articulate their point of view without fear of either reprimand or ridicule. The teachers are similarly encouraged to ensure that the tools used to impart education are supportive to the needs of an inquisitive child.

The core curriculum consists of language acquisition, computational skills, recognition of environment, enhancement of aesthetic skills and social skills. The components of the curriculum are imparted by teachers, and designed to meet the needs of each individual child, based on the child's developmental abilities, and knowledge skills. The class room structure consists of 15-20 students that work, either individually, in groups of three to five or as whole class.

Learning takes place through modules that are theme centered. Learning through theme centered approach is structured at all levels. Theme centered learning focuses on the parallel development of cognitive, motor (fine and gross) skills, and aesthetic appreciation. The different modules of theme centered learning allows the teacher to expand the horizon of the child by allow the individual to explore the different aspects of each theme. The "how" is emphasized more than the "what". In the process the child is thereby allowed to question, think explore and discuss between themselves the ramification of each of the themes. Most importantly, the children are allowed to examine the themes in bilingual setting. Children learn from work sheets and theme directed activities that incorporate language, computation, and discussion. The learning tools reflect the events and elements of natural environment and are continuously modified and refined with each group of students. Teacher discussions allow for the development of complementing "what has worked" for some classes to be introduced in others. Texts books are not prescribed. Teachers go through various resource books and develop their own teaching materials.

3. Development of the educational curriculum and methods of imparting

The comprehensive educational curriculum includes the imparting of knowledge in the following areas: a) Language and communication (English and Tamil), b) computation, c) environment & social science, d) arts e) social skills.

This novel curriculum has evolved over the last three years to reflect the different cultural and economic backgrounds of the children. The children come mostly from impoverished families with resources that are limited. Text books are not used; rather the teacher has incorporated both the learning and testing to work sheets. These work sheets are made, for the different thematic modules, and have received input from the teachers who are in the trenches and educators and advisors who routinely come to the school and provide on site help. In addition at the beginning of each academic year a week long work shop is held and a core of teachers in school provide the basis for the learning to be achieved for each year, receive feedback and fine tune the teaching tools to be used. These instruments of learning are continuously being monitored and fine tuned.

4. The goals for the comprehensive education are as follows in the different age groups

Pre – Schoolers (Ages 3+- 5)

Language building takes place bilingually and this occurs through learning of songs and stories. Vocabulary of the different objects in their environment with the correct phonetics is taught.

Computation skills involves the understanding of sizes (large& small, far and near). They learn to count to 100 orally and write numbers from 1-10.

Environmental Science: The child are taken for walks around the campus and shown the different animals and plants. They are encouraged to draw what they see.
Social Skills are a key element of learning and the concepts of sharing and respecting one another.

Primary Stage (Ages 5+ -10)

Language: At the different age groups the language themes are structured with gradual increase in the complexity and length of stories and songs. They are trained to listen and respond to what they have listened and thereby improve their ability to converse and articulate what they are heard. The weekly assembly program includes a show and tell, in which they bring to the whole school what they have heard and learnt. They are given the liberty to improvise on their own.

Computing skills, involve the use of abacus and other elements that in the math lab and structured for the different age groups.

In environmental science the thematic module designed for each semester or year is introduced in environmental Science. These include, coverage of plant and animal life, the importance of animal and plant life, soil and water conservation.

In the Social Science the role of family is brought in and the children are given description of different family structures. The older children are asked to talk with the elders of the family or village and bring to the class what they have heard about their village.

Co-curricular activities, include dance, music, rhythm, art yoga and games. All co – curricular activities occur in the second half of the academic day.

5. Evaluation of child's progress:

The children maintain a portfolio of what they have been taught. There is a continuous monitoring of the child's progress which is evaluated both by their direct participation in class activities and their input in their individual portfolios. The children are also evaluated in written format by their performance in work sheets. These internal assessments provide the teachers with the documentation of the child's progress and institute appropriate remedial measures, if necessary.

At the end of each term there is a general forum of parent teacher meetings and all questions about the school is provided. The parents are also given an opportunity to talk with individual teachers who provide them with the progress and the help that the child might need from the home.

6. School Schedule:

Arrival 8.30am – 9.00am.
9.15am Assembly
9.30am -10.45am Morning classes
10.45am-11.00am Kanji Break (nutritional drink)
11.00am-12.30am Mid morning classes
12.30pm-1.15am Lunch
1.15-pm-3.15pm. – Co-curricular activities
3.15pm-3.30pm. Snack and milk
3.30pm. School closes and children leave

7. School Facilities:

Vidya Vanam is equipped with a library, music room, audio visual aids and play area. A kitchen and dining room located on campus provide the children with nutritious meals at noon and snacks before they leave school in the afternoon.

Technology-aided Learning: The school has an audio visual room, which has a good stock of videos and tapes on various subjects. In addition the math lab and science labs are equipped with learning tools that help in understanding the concepts of computation.

The students come from a radius of 15 kilometers around Anaikatty. The school bus is provided to bring children to the school and drop them home in the evenings.